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JOSHUA TREES

FREDERICK MORTIMER CLAPP

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BY

FREDERICK MORTIMER CLAPP

BOSTON
MARSHALL JONES COMPANY
1922

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1922

By the Same Author

POETRY

On the Overland
New York and Other Verses

PROSE

Les dessins de Pontormo
Jacopo Carucci
History of 17th Aero Squadron

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JOSHUA TREES

BLOOM ON THE DESERT'S EDGE

DAWN inks in the saw-toothed foothills
against its nickel glare;
and, like the tail end of a flare,
a handful of stars
drag their light through the spikes of a Joshua tree
and sink out of sight.

Night flattens and thickens;
and noiselessly working,
like a mind full of dreams,
spectral exhalations
wind with wool
the acacias' fish-bone leaves.

Time heaves
and lies dead still
an instant's eternity.
Everything waits.
Everything listens.
Chill stillness fills
everything
like the shadow
of a great wing.

A patch of alkali glistens.

And fiercely the sun clears the foothills
and the sky is mercury
hissing with mirage where it eats into the land,
and the air is yellow with acacias in full bloom.

Napoleon's thoughts before Jena must have come like this.

ARCHEOLOGY

CANGRANDE, Gran Podestade di Verona,
they have pried up the lid of your sarcophagus
because it is now the sixth centenary
of your shabby friend Dante—
you remember?—
him whom Florence deported
and who said he had walked through Hell
yet found your stairs so steep.

And Cangrande you are a heap of musty rags
to the camera's hard eye,
a hunched muddle of rags and bones
like the striker they potted on B Street,
Tolusa,
in a recent riot. . . .
They photographed him too
where he lay
for the Sunday paper.

And they have taken out of your hawklike right hand
your long sword of state,
all jewels and fine gold,
and put it into a glass box
with a brief exact label—
name and date,
length and weight.

Ah, Cangrande di Verona,
Grandissima Podestade!

STILL LIFE

TO withdraw impassive upon myself
until the scattered beady quicksilver of thought,
mingling, make my consciousness a mirror
where all things will enter, but none remain;

to assume my selfness completely
by a contraction that envelops and yet rejects all
otherness—
this would be to become a flower.
There is no other birth into perfection.

Anemones, black-hearted paper-fine anemones,
I have found this out
seeing your white, purple, red
reflected in the untroubled reality
of a looking-glass.

But what are you doing in this old bronze pot
on my table?
Your stems are as pale and sinuous as a shepherd's melody.
Come, let us dance together;
it is spring, and I have attended the obsequies
of all my desires.

CONTACT

A CRACKLING spark,
ear-splitting, rips between the polished poles
of your whining static machine,
oscillating
like a whipped rapier.

So we have rushed upon one another
licking through the dry tension of emotion.

And the air stings and rings
with the stimulation and clarity
of ozone.
We have rechemicalized
the circumambient.

VENETIAN GULLS

TO-DAY they have come in from the sea,
the pearl-grey gulls with white throats, white tails,
and wings edged with frills of foam.
The green canal water,
harassed in its hunger for tranquillity
by the worry and bubble of many oars and keels,
lies fitted in between somnolent palaces
like a finely chiseled pavement of Chinese jade.
The hard oblique light falls clearer than flawless glass,
cutting out pink roofs and high pink towers
flat against the sky;
and, wheeling and skimming through it,
on wings frilled with the white of foam,
pearl-grey gulls fly
in straining, ascending and descending spirals,
over green water irised into its depths
with reflections of crumbling brick
and age-ivoried marble.

Skimming, wheeling, wheeling, skimming, they fly
over limpid jade-green water
and its furling, unfurling, irised shadows
that have rinsed out of the backward-slipping centuries
insinuations of yellowing lace,
purple figs,
flaked gilt,
pomegranates,
and frost-flushed creeper leaves where summer still
smoulders.

The gulls fly
in parabolas and hyperbolas, ellipses and cycloids,
flapping hungrily
with a peevish sharp cry.

They swirl, sweeping past empty round-arched windows,
empty gothic windows,
empty flamboyant windows,
and the rusty iron-work and lank slimy seaweed
of water gates.

They swoop past rain-washed balustrades
of porphyry balconies,
squealing down on to floating shadows
of delicate solemn palaces.

Dangling their red feet
they swoop and hover over inverted shadowy palaces
that melt and spread like heavy oils
on the canal's deep green.

It is bitterly cold for early October
and watching the gulls from my window
I am filled with an imprisoned vague desolation.

Hungry intentions swirl through me
in petulant spirals
and flapping hyperbolas—
unattained projects driven in, at the year's end,
from sea beaches of life
that free and changing tides have swept clean.

Improvident intentions veer about in me
whirling whirring wings,
as they settle down over lingering irised reflections in my
mind
of other men's delicate and solemn achievements.

The flawless light of Autumn's reality stares
at a world narrowed to a prison,
under this high pearl-grey layer of unbroken clouds,
where the gulls peevishly crying
have come in famished from the sea.

THE MONKEY CAGE

THE mind seeks liberation
but seeking grasps tighter the bars of incarnation
staring into the misty hypothesis,
and reality is a moment furtively lucid
between dreams.
(This is too technical.)

"Please do not feed or annoy the animals."

The mind seeks liberation,
but few can make an exit unobserved,
and the King of Dahomey
has many spiritual relations
who live in palaces of skulls.
(This is too poetical.)

Give me strength on this foggy morning,
when all the pyramidal pines are as flat and flimsy
as black and white drop-curtains easy to lunge through,
and the live oaks, hugging one another,
are immense toadstools
black-purple on the blue mist
—nothing to knock over;
give me strength to make something
out of the ice-cold iron I have been tugging at.

Shall I twist it like a hairpin
and make an instrument to measure a star?
Shall I brain an enemy with it?
Shall I flail out the seed of tribulation
into penance and a slave's salvation?
Or praise God on a vertical trapeze
putting Swedish gymnastics into another dimension?

The spectators in sleazy bowler hats—
white mouths and goggle eyes,

like codfish nosing about a tank—
gulp each other's excrement,
and gleefully flap about
admiring my captive nudity.

CALIFORNIA: THE HILLS OF BOLINAS

WIND racing inland
pawing the sea into creeping scallops—
heavy-winged, galloping wind,
half horse, half bird—
you bound
and bump against the drooping belly of the clouds,
you stumble
scrambling inland into the steep Sierra.

And the yellow hills like heaps of half-empty balloons
sag back from the beach in crumples,
puff up in bulges,
and shuddering drag at their moorings.

Wind out of Asia,
why are your feet so fierce upon these hills?—
you who have come from the Harp-playing Defile
and tawny Omei-shan,
you who have spoken to the pines of Miajima
and counted the yellow nets
on the beach at Suruga?

CRUCIFIXION

DISPASSIONATELY
I spit my thoughts like flies on a pin
because by their buzzing they keep reminding me
it was love, without which nothing lives,
imprisoned me here
that I might know how beautiful and all-merciful love is
and how nothing matters but love—
me nailed up, as a joke, high between
sparkling Virgo and Sagittarius
with the steady leaking and waste of my days
dripping like water
on to my skull.

ARIZONA

THESE wind-corroded mountains
of malachite and steatite and azurite,
of zinc and mica and feldspar,
and dry as buried bones
and arid as salt crystals in an oven—
O holy land where nothing is that's holy,
where nothing lives but mine prospectors' stakes,
indulger and betrayer of passions
withering and fierce as your sun. . . .
Now grim John and his locusts are an unrolled scroll
to me,
and the Lamb of God, the Boddhi Tree and Mecca.
Listen, there is something screaming
like a scalded baby,
listen, the desert jackal;
and dawn whisks the crawling stars out of heaven
like a scooping hand catching flies on an oil-cloth table.
O Lamb of God,
I am homesick, and men in their cities
are less to me than tumble-weed
bounding across the dry slime
of dead lakes.
The Lord will overwhelm their cities with sand;
the true God will bury their cities
utterly.
But the flute and the drum
and the masked dance of His ritual shall endure,
His revelation shall endure like the mica and feldspar
of these wind-corroded mountains;
and it shall not be for nothing
that more a friendless exile
than once in Galilee or Araby
He tramps about this country.

REVULSION

THIS afternoon
my life came out of its lurking place
underground,
its two-mouthed gopher hole,
and squeaked at me.
Looking up, with its tiny eyes
beady and spiteful,
it winced, it squeaked at me.

What am I?
—the little, bare, rain-pitted mound
nosed up at the mouth of its hole?

What am I?
—the wind's erotic finger
wound like an idiot girl's
round a sun-stricken wild flower
on its burrow's edge?

Or the rotting rain
splitting open the toadstool
of my knowledge
and leaving it stinking and yellow?

But what does it matter what I think I am,
or whether I made it
or it made me,
when my life has squeaked at me
with spiteful eyes?

I know, I know. . . .
It has nibbled in the dark
the roots of bitter weeds.
But then that is its nature.

I'll go and make friends
with the porcelain-faced odalisque
who grins shoving out butter pats
in Boos Bros.' cafeteria.

CUCKOOS

PEOPLE of parchment in beautiful villas,
your gardens' light and shade
plays at chess with the sun;
and on their own tails intent
your peacocks parade
down a lichened balustrade.

Perennial flowers unfold
hearing the grit of your feet
on this gravel path.
Your gardeners are very wise and old.
But your villas' vaulted rooms' array
and your crocuses and stocks
are an aftermath
of long ago and far-away
that keeps you alive while it mocks.
A warm wind rocks your fountain's jet
yet you grow cold.

Weary people of parchment
with an eye, ringed round with wrinkles,
that twinkles
malicious hunger with itself at strife,
once did it make your heart leap,
this unfading beauty—
once, when you paid for it with a sigh
and turned your back on life,
once, before years into many years had slipped
by irretraceable degrees?

You have made your nest
in the remorseless eternity of beauty.
I. . . .
Ah, the seeds of a dream's perpetuity
are too cheap
in Italy
for me.

QUINCE BLOSSOMS

OUT of your leafless stem,
five-petaled quince,
your pistil a pearl,
your stamens a little yellow sheaf,
burst in perfection now the night
that disimprisons you
comes.

I am weary of men and their folly
and of my own folly,
and my days are empty of elation,
and my thoughts—I wince at them
remembering them.

Ah, but pure the delight
with which I curl
the caress of my eyes
around your clusters,
flower sudden as revelation
and unearthly
as second sight.

LIGHT

LIKE a runner running over a starlit plain
breathless, with clenched hands, wildly,
for fear of the sardonic quietness
of the stars,
when the wasted hills settling down into their deep composure
whisper to one another, under the slow rotation of the sky,
when the still night air is cold in his mouth. . . .

Take not away from me, in my breathless running
through the darkness with clenched fingers and bruised feet—
take not from me, you smiling and scornful immensities,
the agonizing light behind my blind eyes—
take not away from me flight.

Look! I am only a crazed runner
running over a starlit plain
wildly, aimlessly, with the cold of death in my mouth,
running, running breathless through my own mania
for fear of the sardonic quietness
of your eternal stars.

SURVIVALS

EVERYWHERE there is something hanging by a thread
all over the world:
bits of loose plaster caught,
twisting with the wind in spiders' webs,
high up on scaling old walls;
fruit, leaves, and seeds that would slip from their dry stems
in the faintest stir of this deep-sleeping Autumn air;
old houses that would crumble
if you let a window slam;
old ships that would sink
if a tired sea-gull lighted on their rail;
cliffs that a beetle's pincers, nipping a spear of grass,
would topple over into peaceful valleys;
avalanches that wait to rumble down
only the melting of one point
of one snowflake's crushed six-pointed star;
bodies, stiffening with death's stoniness,
held up on a will to live
over the grave;
dead ideas, like stuffed birds on a rusty wire,
all dust and rumpled feathers,
still turning in some draughty hallway of the mind,
simulating flight;
the earth itself still counterpoised
on its own dying spinning
in space—
all that absolving time in its hurry overlooks
everywhere lifelessly clinging to life,
in the midst of death's
universal tender loosening into peace.

ONCE MORE THE PATHETIQUE

I LISTENED again, after years, to music
that once like a sea wind
blew clean the summits of my mind.

I listened,
cloudy with seasons of Himalayan mists
sticking to the roof of my world,
and oh so much more than ever
in need of that revelation.

But, wedged in among hundreds of faces,
rows on thick expectant rows of them,
I became a stone-cold Laocoön
crawled over by the coiling and uncoiling
of scaly sounds.

Some one other than myself used my eyes to watch the
conductor sweat.
Some one other than myself was sickened by the breath
of a much-moved woman behind me.

And I ran up through an interminable black tunnel
towards a tiny vent-hole of light.

Curses on the multiplication table!

QUERY TO THE LORD OF LIGHT

DAINICHI, your hands clasped
in the gesture of the union
of mortality with the infinite,
making the symbol of the five senses
closing upon wisdom
clearer than the heart of a diamond. . . .
Dainichi, light of the world,
the gilt flakes off
your golden body;
flake by flake it chips off
and falls into the stone-rimmed pool
below your altar.
And the gold fish wake out of their cold dreams;
they think they see the wings of a dead butterfly;
they dart upon them like streaks of sunlight;
they fight about the flakes
of the bright body
of your immeasurable wisdom;
and their churning tails
leave tiny eddies and ripples
on the pool.

O Illuminator,
how comes the phantom of hunger
to lurk so untamed in the shadow of your light?

THE EXPLORER

HIS brittle hands let a pale rosiness
through from the fire as he passed them over his white beard,
and the skin on his skull
over a puckered bushiness of brows
brought back to me the feeling of an ivory
I have often had in my hands—a stained figure
of a Christ caressed by who will ever say
how many lips.

So when he told me how he explored alone
Lake Nyassa a long, long lifetime ago,
scaling the snow-capped chain of Marununga's peaks
that stand around it
and plunge toothed shadows
into the sun-devoured gold
of its rippleless immensity,
I no longer felt he was sitting there,
fragile and old beside me.
I only heard his quiet voice.

And through my mind
lithe black men, nude, bronze-glossy, full of held-in swiftness,
crawled on all fours, with big white watchful eyes,
through mango thickets,
beyond Ayanga and Makanga,
serpent-wise, in fear of cruel gods,
cruel chiefs, cruel enemies.
And deep behind my eyes
clusters of blooms, obscenely poisonous,
hung from a woven dome of mulando boughs,
strangled and stifling with the stench of decay.

I saw blue-faced baboons with scarlet buttocks
and lecherous tails
slinking through silver reeds

in the heron-haunted Morambala marshes;
and luridly, through the listless air—
green, red, black, yellow, strident streaks they seemed—
great birds
screamed over me, settling like gossamer
down the livid half-light
on gorgeous, unfluttered, outspread plumes.
I felt the crushing sun's heat
on a thatch of swamp-fattened leaves,
while the jungle snapped and shivered
at something squirming its way
down to the molten gold of the lake.

And through it all I kept hearing drums of ebony beating
through a steady throb of beaten drums beating
through a thick, ecstatic pulse of deeper drums,
while an unsteady flute
spilled, like a rivulet of sulphur creeping through the dark,
a trickle of gasping melody
that turned upon itself and coiled and suddenly set free
a shuffling of soft feet
and wriggle of bare flesh
and jiggle of black breasts
in rites more ancient than the jungle is.

Till on the tum-tum, tum-tum-tum,
and unending flicker of the flute
I felt the jeweled pinion of my brain,
on which my thoughts revolve,
spin into giddiness.
For there was something, behind me, beside me, above me,
so soaked and soaked again and steaming
with life,
something so dark and teeming with existence
that the naked black men's naked fear
put its damp fingers into my heart. . . .

Then looking up I saw him stroking in a revery
his white beard
and speaking like one who has forgotten that he speaks.

TO THE DISEMBODIED INTELLIGENCE

OH quickly
out of your polar seclusion
where, by spinning on your heel scornfully,
you have often reversed the motion of the stars . . .
quickly—
this cane-brake is swarming with lascivious pigmies.

I have known in what nothingness consists.
Obliterate my apartness
in the benediction
of your basilisk eyes.

There can be between us now
no side considerations,
no vicious charity.
What if once I did stupidly think
there was a secret kinship
between myself
and forgotten idols?

A SPRING SONG FOR CALIFORNIA

A TOMTIT'S cheep, addressed
to the gurgle of the creek,
flits sharp as a little crotchet's hook
jotted carelessly oblique
in a new blank-book.
This season's pullets have begun to sit.
The gruntings of a saxophone
intone with unregarding glee
someone's opulent vacuity
too long suppressed.
A punted football's twirls
loop up and droop
into a crook'd arm.
The sunshine is blue as an arc light,
and the swirls of the hill's edge through it
delight
even me.

Now moment after moment limpidly laps against me
like a warm ripple and yields
gayly
its tether on eternity
to another.
A violent cyclamen stares
in a red pot.
The marble clouds pile up
and file away behind the trees
complacently.
The rains have passed
like naked girls
running at dawn over fallow fields.
The ground is soft as a cheese to spade
and bursting buds shake a cannonade
over ants gone mad on their army affairs,
while local architects swing and smile
in swivel chairs.

GRAMOPHONE SOLO

FINGERING a tune on my clarionet
I burned a village of wooden shacks—
these melodious attacks
are more insidious than they seem.

Yet people look for lightning in their music—
the flash that will short-circuit their emotions
through me!
Then they go shouting, "Firebug! Firebug!"

Engine of our inspiration
(And how like a thing beset
it spins
fearfully;
look, and the spark of it
how it skims and skips!),
engine, before your hum
acts like a drug
and still more mixed our metaphors become,
intimate, intimate to me
what makes you make me squeeze a melody
through the tube of a clarionet
and hold it like elixir to their lips
when where it drips it burns—
since fire is the liquid of the voice of any bird
and crematory to the common herd?

. VERSUS .

ELECTION Day.
The sky-blue plumbago basks,
a motionless wave of bloom,
under this dry exhilarating
California sun.

Ford cars, buzzing like clocks
that have lost their balance-wheels,
deliver eggplants,
polished and purple,
and white ranch eggs stuck in cardboard pigeon-holes.
A gramophone grits its teeth over a jazz.
Crack!
They are playing baseball in the lot next door.

Election Day!
And which shape of straw
will the befuddled giant choose this time
to jiggle on jocose thumb at his puppet-show,
while Europe, in her dotage,
looks up, incredulous, lacrymose.
expecting—
surely not another Messiah!

Election Day.
My newspaper crinkles and smells like a sawmill
as, open-mouthed, I skim over the last exhortations
of frantic and unselfish candidates.

Crack!
They are playing ball in the lot next door—
"Yea-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-ay"
Surely not already the Messiah!

The plumbago basks in the still sun,
scentless and sky-blue.

A STYLIST

SELF-SUFFICIENT and shut in upon myself
I thought I could hold words on to the grindstone
of my imagination,
so firm, so long,
that with the fine edge of their subtlety
I could, when the moment came,
chip imperishable figures
out of the unquarried ledges of my life.

How many years have been sucked up
into my stone's whirling
and lost in the gush of its winking sparks!
How many years—
while the shapes I was going to chisel
have faded out of my mind.

Faded completely.
And now I have it in my hands,
this whetted instrument,
what am I to do with it
hacking and hewing at shadows
that mocking
hack and hew at me?

Ouf, the cliff sculptures of Tibet and China!

REVOLUTIONARIES

TO bring down suddenly and utterly,
as an earthquake would, the rotting edifice
where Faith has been walled up in incest with the shadow
of her fear
for centuries and centuries,
to burn the rags of Faith's diseases and her rusty irons
in a vision's smokeless flame—this was their dream,
when Thought (who knew the purging of his parents'
incest
would make a beggar of him on the public streets)
in their ear
whispered a syllable that gave again to their mortal eyes
a pregnant sight . . .
while treacherously caressing the wayward flower-flame
of their vision
he tore loose from eternity
the slim deep roots of its light.

WINDLESS RAIN

RAIN at dawn on the tiles of Venice,
a soft straight steady slipping down of rain:
water mistily passing into water
with a diffused hush.
Not another sound in the city,
no lapping of waves, no knocking together of boats.
Everything sleeping.

I look out and watch the rain,
until the silence of the low misty clouds
and the silence of the sleeping city,
and the inner silence into which all my thoughts have been
sucked up
cling to one another
with the chill caressing gesture
of the Three Graces,
the delicate Lesbian goddesses
of the cathedral library of dry Siena.
I see them projected from the magic lantern of my mind
against the impalpable unbroken
background of the rain. . . .

Mesmerizing sound of rain on canal water—
There is a shadowless beginning of light now
everywhere;
but at the corner of Calle Lanza and Calle San Gregorio
lamplight is yellow still on grey walls.

CIRCULAR FANS

THE perimeters of the minds of most people,
how quickly you can measure them!—
two carved or painted little sticks
of environment and heredity
laid face to face,
and when with the bright smile of an idea
you open them,
turning them through their full orbit,
when carefully laying them back to back
you fasten the gilt clasp of their prejudice,
there outspread, the pleated complete circle of their
intelligence:
a low moon scratched across by river reeds perhaps;
a humble doorway into daily tribulations;
some emblematic holy figure. . . .

Fan yourself!
How will you ever
stir otherwise this torpid air?

BYZANTINE MOSAICS

GESTICULATION and laughter and bombardment
of flowers
beside this deep blue sea,
under this deep sea-blue sky.
The chattering crowd falls greedily on its moment—
the living promiscuous crowd living out its living desires.
It is the feast of the Most Holy and Immaculate Virgin,
the compassionate, the interceding.

The swirling frivolity of thousands of faces
gurgles around me
lapping into my eyes with bright provocative ripples.
But, turned in upon myself,
I remember
that, in the twilight of crumbling apses,
I have seen recognition
in fixed inhuman eyes
and something invisible to others
pass over their expression
as I have gazed up at half-obliterated figures
tall and very frail and loaded down
with all the sapphires and emeralds
of imperial treasuries.

Ascetic and cruel and cadaverous women
cancerous with defeat and an empire's decrepitude,
insane and exquisite and inquisitive women
silent with the poison of an impassive voluptuousness
and full of ruinous understanding,
we have understood one another
without intercession or compassion.
And how should I not be a stranger at flower festivals
among these children of barbarians,
when in my mind you linger

enduring without a gesture
the gleaming functions
and tedious last rites
of plague-depopulated capitols?

The obscurity and falling away of dead time
is bridgeless between us.
And you will never come back again to this impoverished
world
where only paltry and tawdry counterfeits,
like these tinseled village girls made up as queens,
enthroned while the procession lasts
from city gate to city gate,
parade
in pasteboard cars of triumph.

I have looked into your great fixed eyes
and seen the end of life like a little light
floating far-off on the edge of the sea at night.
You have turned upon yourselves
and, cold and distracted, you watch
your erudite and sycophantic priests
move imperturbable through yet another incense-stifled
cycle
of senseless ritual,
while Scythians and Bulgarians
paw at the gates.
O frail and pitiless and aching
under your crushing,
gem-encrusted tunics,
we have understood one another;
we are heavy and helpless with understanding.

And yet a worm of envy works his file-like tongue
on the quick of me.

To feel my heart flutter up
with exaltation like a peasant boy's

watching his love as queen of the festival
ride by
billowy with mosquito net
and drawn by plodding plough horses!
Or to jeer and be full of the joy of jeering
familiar, thoughtless, unwounding,
like these village people
when she kisses her hands at them
with the jerky movement of a manikin.

POSTPONEMENT

THROUGH the rock crystal of my silence
run silver flaws;
unsung songs beating against it
have cracked with fine fissures the globe of my silence,
and the knife-thin ray of inner light
with which I probe into the future
splinters along them into ghostly spectra.

If only I had put out my hand
when they flew hard into the deceiving crystal,
as bewildered birds fly into the light,
I should not now, in this darkness,
be wrapped and wrapped,
like an unrisen Lazarus,
in all these swathing ribbons of rainbows.

PEACE

COME, my own, let us steep ourselves in beauty,
for in the world no sacrifice avails,
no purity avails or holiness.

They walked in the flame of death as into sunlight,
and they made themselves for others the inner flame of life—
they are dead and the names of them, who will remember?

They have fallen among obscene shadows that have quenched
the burning of their vision,
shadows piled up, ages deep, by dead lust, dead greed,
around them dead and around us living,
shadows full of insatiable teeth and padded paws that prowl,
betrayals, trafficking, plottings, money-changing.

The beasts of the thickets of money and power—
they have bartered the ashes of their bones,
they have sold their unnameable martyrdom and passion,
they have traded in the divine trance of their utter devotion,
they have made of their death a trap with which to waylay us.

Come, my own, let us steep ourselves in beauty,
for it alone has in it no root of corruption,
for it alone is consolation;
be it only the resonance fallen mysteriously on a word,
the morning's unfolding
or the night's restoring transfigurations,
the laughter of a child, the singing of a bird, the quiver of a leaf—
be it only this tragic and imprisoned and tumultuous
heart of yours,
or be it only now at last,

only the tender gesture of understanding,
long lacking,
with which I look into your mind,
and you look deep down into mine and bring me peace.

SUBURBAN TWILIGHT

INTO the thickening dusk
I carried the dusk of my alien mind.
Silence congealed on the cement sidewalks
speculators have scratched across empty fields.
Here and there a human fly
buzzed in a ready-made house.

The sign posts were as meaningless and askew
as my thoughts—
"Paradise Point, Tract P 3, Panoramic Way."

This, I said, is an iniquity of drawing paper and India ink,
a calculation,
a diagram,
a zoölogical garden of logic and lust.

The silence was like a blue jelly
and, as I walked, it quivered into a blear piping,
a shrill throbbing.

It was as if all the memories of my childhood
sitting around the puddle of unconsciousness,
began whimpering.

I listened, thinking to myself, "At least there still are
frogs."
Then I passed a popcorn peddler's cart,
and the little whisk of steam from his whistle,
spiffling drearily,
blew away white into the unlighted night.

ANNOUNCING A DISSOLUTION SALE

"BEATITUDE.
This article goes to the bargain counter
Friday.
A limited supply from our own agent
in the Elysian Fields.
Assorted. Guaranteed. First come, first served.
No orders C. O. D. will be received.
100,000,000 samples have been sold.
The price is right and cut down to the quick.
Sacrifice!
These goods for while they last.
Our motto-monogram on every package:
'To him that hath.'
Shop early. Bring your friends."

(Galvanic arms and hands
knock over the salesmen
waving paper money
sticky with sweat and blood.
The cash register chokes.)

I put my face against the plate-glass door,
but seeing the exaltation of the mob
I saunter to a graveyard that I know
to hum love-songs and study epitaphs,
(This form of piety repays a rhetorician.)
while dandelions, sprinkled through the grass,
make mimic maps
of prehistoric heavens.

COSTA SCARPUCCIA

THROUGH the lit mist
that flows low under the night sky
like a silver dust-cloud over the city,
nine orange lights on an unseen hill—
nine orange street lamps of Fiesole
alive with a faint twinkling in the black stillness
mimicking the constellation of Cassiopeia setting.

I carry my mind like a falcon asleep on my wrist,
and it does not peel the thin wrinkled skin from its eye
as I wander down the steep flagged gorge of this silent old street.
Like a falcon chained with a fine gold chain
my mind sleeps, drooping its predatory wings.

And, fearless of startling it into flight,
I look up and see
all the thoughts and desires, like my own, that have made men make the city,
hewing it, year in year out, day in day out, with weary chisels
out of cold stones,
carving it slowly in the image of their fate
enfeoffed to the cruel wings of their dreams.

I look up and see,
under the nine far-away orange street lamps of Fiesole
laid against the hill like Cassiopeia setting,
the everliving races of the birds of divination and hope
where they sit in a brooding rookery
on the edge of shadows that hang from jutting roofs
of banks, shops, bureaus, hotels, houses—
bald, old vultures with hunched-up, shoulder bones,
and hoary, bedraggled owls,

and ruffled, river-haunting cranes—
their claws clenched tight on rain-smoothed cornice gutters,
their beaks thrust under their wings.

I look up and see them
and my falcon mind sinks its talons deep into my wrist.

REQUIEM

The birth of an essentially American art is momentarily expected.—Radio Broadcast.

LARVA in a steel-blue crevice
under hills of ice,
strange speck-embodied pain of coming wings too delicate
for flight,
insect,
why are you trying to be born
in this Switzerland not garnished yet
with lepidopterists?

I see by your feeble pulsations
you feel a lost ray of the sun
come crawling
over the glacier of recorded fact.
Ah, but will nothing
reverse the useless cycle of your fated becoming?

This shadowy dawn is fallacious.

Already as a worm
(much less as painted death-moth
or ghostly dragon-moth)
you are too . . . old!

OTHERNESS

IT is so silent here I cannot think.
An oak leaf's clicking fall
denudes my mind of continuity;
and the ringlet waves of putting
the twos and twos of life together
lap backwards over one another
and die out into this silence
like a wind's breath
held in over a pool.
I see the crooked image of a bough,
the flickering of a butterfly;
and bending nearer over myself
I put my face down
and feel the chill of otherness
creep over my eyes.

TO A BIVALVE

CREATURE of accretions,
at noon, under the sea water's pale-green half night,
half day,
grain by grain
you are making for yourself a wall of rainbows
secretly out of the dark, swaying sea.
Yet what can you know of fabulous signs and promises
arched red, purple, blue,
binding sudden rifts of serene sky
to the scudding foam—
you, when the foot of their arch is set on the edges of the
world,
you
—bubbles,
a little, wobbling, up-striving stream
black over, silver under,
the breadth of your mouth?

Turn inward your dreams, O my spirit.
Let the inside even of your rebellion be a rainbow
better to you than many-colored, far-away,
false hopes.

Look, these millions of upturned faces
distorted with anguish
—waiting for the miracle!
Look, these millions of fixed eyes
ashen with disillusion!

MARIONETTES

AT the sun-silvered far end of the empty square,
their backs to me, they walk side by side,
shoulders and hips just touching;
they are both in black,
and her slanted bright parasol
covers their inclined heads
like a little green dome.

I see them stop,
and his arm, extended in its black sleeve
ending in a white hand,
makes twice
a gesture, an appeal.

They walk on again
crossing a blue polygon of shadow
fallen askew from the grey corroded front
of an ancient church.
They loiter
where the joints of the flags of the sun-silvered square
converge.

I do not know who they are,
and from my window they seem now
hardly an inch high.
Yet in the clear depths of my introspection
I see, sharp from their feet, diverging beyond them
far out, year behind year,
a crowded perspective
interpenetrating like a diorama
the sunny walls of the old square's houses.

Something has dropped out of eternity into time.

And I feel the shimmering waters of their trance
suck me under

into a stillness where the stars are lit at midday.
They saunter on again.
No wonder her tilted parasol
is shot with the dye
of spring's unfolding tenderest leaves.

WORDS

FROM high up among interwoven branches
that make black rivers against my mind's moonlight,
words let go of their chilled twigs
and spinning drift downward
through the inner stillness of my meditation.

And they are miraculous words
like the words of incantations.

What can they ever be to me these heaps of leaves
the keepers of gardens and graves
have raked up crinkling beside the crowded highway?

Would I be a wind to blow them into the pitiable faces
of hurrying travelers?
Would I stoop with the flame of a match to set them
smouldering
for the sake of the blue-white column of smoke
rooted in their decay and twisting like a waterspout
into the clouds?

Would I dim the eyes of those who do not see
the end of their journey
with the gusty eddies and rustle of prophecy?
Would I deceive these crawling convoys creaking through
the desert
from one bondage into another
with a pillar of smoke?

The flash and hurrying clamor of the highway;
the unceasing rumble of its wheels;
the unresting pattering and shuffle of feet;
and out of the moonlit silver plains and black rivers of
my mind,
sifting downward through the sacred stillness
of my meditation,
magic unavailing words.

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